

HEPATITIS A (Infectious Hepatitis)

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a disease caused by the hepatitis A virus which results in inflammation of the liver. Formerly, hepatitis A was called infectious hepatitis. In children the disease is usually mild, but most adults who develop hepatitis are ill enough to miss four to six weeks of work.

Who gets hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A, but it occurs more often in children.

How is the virus spread?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the feces (stool) of infected persons and is usually spread by the fecal-oral route. Hepatitis A may be spread by food prepared or handled by an infected person who does not wash his/her hands carefully. Hepatitis A may be spread by water contaminated with human feces. It may also be spread by close intimate contact (household or sexual) and by diaper changing.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

The first symptoms are usually fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and malaise. This is usually followed by dark colored urine and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes). In general, the severity of illness increases with age and children under age three may not have symptoms, though they can still spread the infection. Most people feel better after one to two weeks, but may continue to feel tired for a few more weeks.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Usually the first symptoms appear at about one month, but can develop anytime between two and six weeks, after being exposed.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

People are most infectious in the two weeks before their symptoms appear and remain somewhat infectious about one week after jaundice.

Can a person get Hepatitis A again?

After one infection with hepatitis A, a person cannot get it again. However, there are different types of viral

hepatitis, and infection with hepatitis A will not protect against other types of hepatitis.

What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. Bed rest is generally all that is needed. Infected persons should also avoid alcohol, drugs, or medicines (including aspirin and Tylenol), without checking with a doctor.

What can be done after a person is exposed to a person infected with hepatitis A?

Immune globulin is given to family members and close (including sexual) contacts of persons with hepatitis A. The best time to get the shot is within two weeks after contact with someone who has hepatitis A. Immune globulin is not recommended for persons who have contact with an infected person at school, work or a brief visit to their home.

How can the spread of hepatitis be stopped?

The spread of hepatitis A can be stopped by **always** washing hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing a diaper. Children should be taught to wash their hands with soap after using the toilet. **Washing hands before preparing food is very important.**

Recently there has been two hepatitis A vaccines approved for use in the U.S.. To be fully immunized, the person would need a second injection of vaccine six to 12 months after the first injection. The vaccine is recommended for anyone traveling to an endemic area. Persons who eat out a great deal, work in day care centers, handle food or engage in other high risk activities may want to consider immunization for hepatitis A.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal doctor
- Your local health department, listed in your telephone directory
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191

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